

BACKGROUND

Heart disease is America's number-one killer. The American Heart Association estimates that more than 60 million Americans—well over a quarter of the adult population—suffer from one or more forms of cardiovascular disease, which includes coronary heart disease (chest pain or acute heart attack), congestive heart failure, high blood pressure, stroke, and congenital heart defects.

WHAT VA IS DOING

Areas of focus for VA research on heart disease include evaluating and developing new treatments, probing the genetic and lifestyle causes of heart disease, and developing new rehabilitation methods.

Highlights of current or recent research include the following:

- **Vascular surgery and blocked arteries**—A study that included more than 500 veterans at 18 VA hospitals found that the common practice of preventively clearing blocked coronary arteries prior to non-cardiac vascular surgery—such as for clogged leg arteries—accomplishes little. The researchers concluded that heart-protective drugs alone may be enough to guard against cardiac complications from vascular surgery.
- **Kidney test predicts heart risk**—A blood test used to show kidney function also foretells cardiovascular disease and overall risk of death in older people, according to research at the San Francisco VA. In the study, higher levels of cystatin-C—a protein found in the blood—indicated future risk better than diabetes, high blood pressure, or self-reported health status.
- **Studying cardiac remodeling**—Scientists at the Brooklyn (NY) VA Medical Center are using rodent models of heart disease to study how the heart rebuilds itself after a heart attack. This natural process, known as “remodeling,” has side effects that can potentially raise the risk of sudden cardiac death or heart failure.

For more information on VA research:

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